



# MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH &  
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **FEELING “SAD” DURING THE WINTER MONTHS?** *IDENTIFYING AND TREATING SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER*

**NASHVILLE**—The winter season may bring about cold temperatures, dreary days and feelings of depression for many Tennesseans. These feelings may be caused by a condition known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) which tends to occur more often in the winter months, especially January and February. It is now estimated that 4-6% of the population suffers from SAD. It is four times more common in women than in men, but, when present, men may have more severe symptoms. Young adults are also more likely to suffer from SAD, but it is uncommon in people under 20.

SAD is a mood disorder that follows a seasonal pattern related to variations in sunlight. Along with feelings of depression, symptoms include change in appetite, excessive need for sleep, cravings for sugary and/or starchy foods and avoidance of social situations. If a person experiences these symptoms, a mental health expert can accurately diagnose SAD and treatment options can then be explored. Health care professionals may recommend one of the following treatments:

**Increased Light Exposure.** Symptoms of SAD are often triggered by a lack of exposure to light and tend to drastically decrease, and even go away completely, when light increases.

**Light therapy.** Stronger symptoms of SAD may be treated with light therapy, also known as phototherapy, which involves the use of a special light that simulates daylight.

**Medications.** Medications, such as antidepressants, may be prescribed for individuals with SAD depending on the severity of the symptoms.

“If you are diagnosed with seasonal affective disorder, there are action steps you can take to help relieve and overcome your symptoms,” stated Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities’ Commissioner Virginia Trotter Betts. “First and foremost, follow your health practitioner’s recommendations, get plenty of exercise, maintain proper nutrition, and stay involved in activities with family and friends. These actions are worth the effort to promote your health.”

For more information on SAD, including educational materials, or additional mental health information, please contact TDMHDD’s Office of Public Information and Education at (615) 253-4812 or visit [www.state.tn.us/mental](http://www.state.tn.us/mental).

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